



# Guilford High School

605 New England Road, Guilford, CT 06437

Phone: 203.453.2741 Fax: 203.453.6768

[www.ghs.guilfordschools.org](http://www.ghs.guilfordschools.org)

February 23, 2017

Dear Honorable Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Lauren Distasio-Zuk and I am the special education transition coordinator at Guilford Public Schools. This letter is to address significant concerns related to the governor's budget proposal and the impact it will have on students with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

I have worked with students ages 14-21 for the past nine years with Guilford Public Schools. My primary job is to work with students, families, teachers and adult services providers to develop goals and objectives and appropriate programs for students with various abilities and disabilities as they transition into adulthood. With the support of the staff at Guilford Public Schools, families, local businesses, adult services providers and community members, we have all put an incredible amount of effort into providing appropriate services for each and every student. All students with intellectual and developmental disabilities have participated in our extensive vocation program to gain exposure and experience in the work world. I've built relationships with over 40 businesses in and around the community to provide meaningful vocation experiences based on individual interests and abilities. Most of these students have gained valuable experience in various work sites and have been given the skills to gain competitive and/or supported employment. The local businesses are not only receptive to offering internships, but also embrace these students and consider them part of their work family. If the funding for day and employment services is not restored, not only will these young adults not receive appropriate support, they will end up staying home with little to no community exposure; hence, all the work we've done in public schools to support them will be lost opportunities for the students and businesses. Not only will these young adults experience failure and loss, but the families will also be greatly impacted by this loss of funding. Most families have a two income household and don't have the means to provide proper support for their children at home. If this is the case, many families will be forced to quit their jobs in order to support their children. This could also impact the state's budget as the families may be forced to apply for social security/Medicaid since they will no longer be receiving income or insurance from their employment.

Having worked with many students with intellectual and development disabilities over the years, I will testify that each person has the same goals and desires as the neuro-typical population: they want to belong to and be active participants in the community. Taking away funds for the neediest population would be disastrous to families and the community. Please do not "punish" the young adults with disabilities and their families. They have persevered through their limitations and have risen above their expectations. Many of my recent graduates, who in the past, may have been deemed "unemployable" have gained competitive employment and are very active members of the community. I can't imagine where these young adults would be right now if they did not have the funding and supports that were provided to them after exiting public school. I encourage anyone in this decision making process to take the time to meet with some of these students and I can guarantee it will greatly impact their decision.

**PLEASE RESTORE FUNDING FOR DAY AND EMPLOYMENT SERVICES FOR NEW GRADUATES,  
FAMILY SUPPORT GRANTS AND BEHAVIORAL SUPPORT SERVICES.**

Sincerely,

Lauren Distasio-Zuk

203-453-2741 X1316

[distasiozukl@guilfordschools.org](mailto:distasiozukl@guilfordschools.org)